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DRAPERIES AND EMBROIDERIES IN THE EAST.

By S. M. PUTNAM.



DRAPERIES and embroideries, as accessory to house furnishing and decoration, have full efflorescence in the East. The tendency of the Oriental mind is to sumptuousness of effect in all that pertains both the wardrobe and household adornment, and in it the sentiment of color is a vigorous principle. The warm sunshine that brings out the brilliant flora of the landscape, and has its complement in the rich tone of the human complexion, seems to encourage in the mind of the Turk, the Syrian, the Persian and the Egyptian a fondness for vivid hues and pronounced contrasts of hue and tint in all their manufactures. Thus we see in their carpetings, with the quaint and curious designs in which they appear, a bizarre intermixture of the strongest colors known to the art of the dyer. Indeed, in the semi refinement of idea (or, it may be in the semi-barbarous idea) of the Orientals, the dyestuffs for the *faded* and delicate colors given to fabrics in middle Europe, seem not yet to have been discovered; although in the commercial interchange which

exists, Eastern nations are by no means averse to appropriating the French brocates and brocades in the place of the Syrian damasks and the Turkish and Algerian striped stuffs.

There is a charming variety in the beautiful draperies that they affect. But the draperies, in the manner of use, are unique and in a distinctive sense original. In house furnishing, or wall decorations, to a certain extent they are made to subserve the purpose of frescoing and to fill the lack of pictures. Draped side walls constitute a picture in Oriental houses, and draped ceilings are not infrequent. Using the brilliantly cross-striped, native furniture fabrics of Algeria, Egypt, Syria and other Eastern countries, we find fine, large rooms as glowingly hued as if decorated with broken sections of rainbows—the red, the blue, the violet and the green brought out the more vividly by the liberal intermixture of the gold and the silver tinsel interwoven—the grounding in most instances being either white or black. Eight breadths of the material being gathered to a point in the centre of the ceiling, a star-like effect is produced by drawing the fabric out to its full width to each corner and to the middle of each side wall of the room, the breadths being carried down the walls to the baseboard. The junction of the breadths in the center of the ceiling is covered with a great single, double or triple rosette formed of the draping stuff, this ornament serving in the place of the plaster moulding seen on the ceilings of American and French houses, and heading the chandelier, the central pipe of which pierces the objective ornament. The drapery on the side walls is also gathered to a point at the middle of its depth, and there appears also a rosette. Instead of the rosette a porcelain plaque is the ornament which sometimes covers the gathering in the drapery; or instead of the porcelain plaques, there are used the plaques made of straw sent out from China and Japan—the commercial intercourse between China, Japan and India with Egypt, Syria and Turkey filling the markets of the latter countries with curios from the former countries. The drapery effected, the blank spaces on the walls claim attention, and here, in the place of pictures, mirrors are brought into requisition; or, lacking mirrors, the peculiar embroideries of the East come into use. Barring the windows, which are in one side of the room, at least the doors, and it may be the mantel-shelf—which inevitably interfere with the decoration of the side walls—mirrors are set all around the room; or, the mirrors wanting, there are set scarfs of the linen stuff peculiar to the East, enriched at each end with brilliantly-colored embroidery, gathered together in the center and held by a small porcelain or straw plaque, with the ends spread out like a fan, which fill in all the spaces between the breadths of the drapery.

With the great rosette in the center of the ceiling, the dra-

pery is sometimes festooned around the sides of the ceiling, and festooned drapery forms the frieze around the side walls. In this method of ornamentation the mirrors employed in furnishing the room are larger, the embroidered scarfs being set between the mirrors or arranged in fan-like effects in the corners of the room—the careless methods of their use in our own country nowhere appearing as the outcome of Oriental taste or fancy. The material used for the draperies in question forms always the curtains for the windows and the door-hangings, if door-hangings appear, and in most cases the divans and the chairs are upholstered with it.

The effect of all this drapery, if of a striped fabric, must seem to one who has never seen furnishing of the kind, heavy, gaudy and untasteful. But when it is borne in mind that the rooms so decorated are from twenty to thirty feet square (and frequently larger) and the pitch of the ceilings from one to three feet higher than the pitch of ceilings with us, it is rich and gorgeous, although semi-barbaric in effect, rather than displeasing. The mirrors duplicate and reduplicate the brilliant colors, and the gold and silver introduced in the draping stuffs gleam out in as dazzling luxury as though they were the pure metals, and not a tinsel.

Fresco for ceiling decoration, however, is common in the East, and may be said to vary the more distinctive and characteristic drapery decoration. But, with the exception of the frescoing seen in palaces, not much is to be said in its favor. For the most part the designs are inartistic, and the execution is indifferent, while, as the development of an Oriental idea, it is frequently helped out with wall draperies of the stuffs alluded to. We see pretentious drawing rooms with the ceiling frescoed, a breadth of striped or floriated draping stuff filling in the corners, these pieces of stuff drawn together in the center of their depth in hour-glass fashion, and a Chinese straw or a porcelain plaque set at this point. In some cases a large and showy mirror fills in the blank spaces on the walls, or, with a handsome mantel mirror, the side walls are hung with a piece of richly-colored embroidery, large enough for a bed-spread, these flanked on each side with embroidered scarfs so arranged as to show the design of the work perfectly. Varying the marvellous embroideries of the Oriental women, there are equally marvellous pieces of patchwork, and these patchwork creations, instead of being used for bed-coverings, as in our country, also appear as wall-hangings. They are not after the style of patchwork usually seen in America and Europe, and done by our mothers and grandmothers, *i. e.*, of small pieces of chintz, cashmere or silk sewed together in some set pattern, to which is given a more or less suggestive name, but are in intricate foliated and floriated designs, cut out of calicoes in red, yellow, green, blue and other strong colors, and applied or hemmed on to a grounding of white muslin. The design in some pieces of this work has its beginning in the center of a piece of muslin two yards square, in the semblance of a flower or other fancy, with stems branching out in all directions, and leaves, flowers, buds and tendrils formed on the stems. A foliated, or floriated border, framed in on each side by a strip of muslin in solid color, usually finishes the striking piece of work, and the effect of a patchwork hanging on a wall is no less remarkable than the work itself.

The embroideries of the East are almost as varied, both as to the stitches introduced in them and in the designs, as the specimens shown. They are the work of the women, and are generally done on the linen of the respective countries in which they are found, and the linen is of flax grown at home and spun and woven by hand. Some of the pieces are very elaborate, having required years for their completion, the handsomest being very old and the more valuable for their antiquity. Just now there seems to be a demand for the work done in a single color—Turkey-red, for instance—while frequently the design is so dense as to cover the grounding almost entirely. Many of them are said to be done by the ladies of the harems, who, as the nuns in the European convents, in their laces and needle work, thus beguile the tediousness of enforced confinement; in the course of time the work finding its way to the bazaars; and some of them are the work of the peasantry, who are engaged by the merchants to supply their shops. To those interested in the beautiful and the artistic, these embroideries constitute one of the most potent attractions to the Eastern bazaars. Many pieces bear the unquestionable stamp of age, while the superiority of design, coloring and execution of the old over the newer pieces is likewise unquestionable. It is not an affectation to admire an old piece of Oriental embroidery, as it is in some cases to admire an old and moth-eaten rug. The stitches introduced in numerous instances are as fine as the thread of the tissue upon which

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the work is done, and the colors, softened by lime, are as delicately beautiful as the mellowed colors of an old painting. As in the drapery fabrics manufactured, gold and silver threads enter conspicuously into the embroideries, the effect in some pieces being exceedingly dazzling and gorgeous. European museums are rapidly gathering in the most curious of these specimens of domestic Oriental handicraft, and some of them are finding their way to America through travellers—the temptation to their possession being irresistible with persons who appreciate their value as curiosities or works of art.

These embroideries are used in the East not only as draperies,

of Rhodes, on the Island of the name; and the Smyrna bazaars furnish embroideries as notable as are the carpets for which the city is famous. Salonica is celebrated for its embroideries, and the shops of the Constantinople bazaar show pieces of work that are worth well nigh their weight in gold. While less effective to the casual observer, it may be—than the old embroideries found in Italy and France, and far less pronounced than the modern needlework of England and America, for uniqueness of design, judgment in the use of colors, skill in execution, and the patience inevitably observable in the perfection of the work, the embroideries of the Eastern women excel those done in any other



THE DINING-ROOM IN MRS. JENNESS MILLAR'S RESIDENCE, NEW YORK, BY C. W. CLARK.

but as bed-spreads, table-covers and antimacassers, among those of the householders who have become imbued in a measure with western customs, and they are sometimes appropriated in dress. While the same general characteristics seem to characterize all the embroideries of the Oriental women, there are certain differences which distinguish those of the Turkish women from those of the Armenian, and the handiwork of the Syrian women shows also features of difference from that done by their neighbors. Some of the most interesting pieces of work seen by travellers in the East are to be found in the hands of small dealers in Larnaca, the chief city on the Island of Cyprus, and in the city

quarter of the globe; and they remain special to Eastern countries inasmuch as the attempt to copy them has been nowhere else attempted. Imagination is inevitably active when, from the shelves of a shop in the Stamboul bazaar, the dealer draws down some choice piece which he describes as the work of some fair odalisque, of the harem of a Sultan long since gone to his account with Allah. Insensibly we handle it as tenderly, as curiously—as the one poor resource of pleasure in a young life condemned to a thralldom, which was as hateful as its surroundings were mockingly gorgeous. The glowing red which in some pieces is the only color employed, seems to bear the reflection of

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the heart's blood, and the spots on the time-tinted surface of the grounding are the tears which fell from the eyes of the patient worker as she nursed over her hopeless captivity—the death in life of a young creature fitted by nature for all that life offers of purity and enjoyment. Inwrought with many a piece of this marvellous handiwork is a story, doubtless, which would put to shame the most vivid conception of the most startling writer of romance.

There is abundant suggestiveness in the Oriental methods of appropriating drapery fabrics and of adjusting draperies. At first, to our western eyes, accustomed to so different arrangements of house decoration and hangings, the pronounced materials employed frequently in the East, and the pronounced effects produced of or with these materials, are not altogether

than the hard effects that distinguish the treatment to which the walls in American houses are usually subjected. The vivid colors, the glaring stripes and the tinselry in the draping stuffs of the East are not easily reconcilable to Western taste, but stuffs less gaudy in character and coloring are at command, and the methods of Oriental use in house-furnishing could be so modified by skillful upholsterers as to be charming and artistic.

METALLIZED LACE is now so much in vogue that it is possible that petticoats and skirts may be made of it. Every kind of lace is used for this new style of ornament, and it looks exactly like what it is, a delicate fabric steeped in a metallic bath, and when hardened by exposure to the outer air, retaining all



A CORNER IN THE DINING-ROOM OF MRS. JENNESS MILLAR'S RESIDENCE, NEW YORK, BY C. W. CLARK.

pleasing; but more accustomed to them, as with many a fashion with which we become familiarized, they might in time not only be tolerated but be deemed delightful. Considering "the fitness of things," so earnestly contended for by the moralist, the warm effects secured by the methods of adjusting draperies in house-furnishing in the East are far better adapted to our climate than to the climate of Eastern countries. They are peculiarly suited to our Northern winters, and would lend the finishing effect of comfort now so often lacking in our houses, despite our more admirable methods of heating them. The full, warm curtains of the Eastern house, for the winter, are an indubitable improvement upon the cold and stiff holland shades which, in many cases, are made to suffice for window dressing in our country; and the wall draperies noticed are surely more artistic

than the fairy like curves and designs of the Irish, French, or Flemish point employed to manufacture it. The more flimsy the lace the handsomer is the gold or silver article made therefrom. Silver is, however, far prettier than gold, and is becoming fast a great favorite for making Medicis collars or Elizabethan ruffs.

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